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REPS. LARSON, COURTNEY CONDEMN BUSH'S DECISION TO CUT HEALTH CARE FOR THOUSANDS OF CT CHILDREN

HARTFORD ♦ U.S. Representatives John B. Larson (CT-1) and Joe Courtney (CT-2) today denounced President George W. Bush's decision to cut health care coverage for thousands of Connecticut children currently enrolled in the state's successful HUSKY B program. Larson and Courtney were joined at Connecticut Children's Medical Center (CCMC) by CCMC President and CEO Martin J. Galvin and CCMC Physician-in-Chief Paul Dworkin, MD.

Late on Friday night, August 17, the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services sent a letter to state health officials informing them of unilateral rules changes made by the White House to significantly reduce the income thresholds states use to determine the eligibility of children for the State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP), which provides funds for HUSKY B. The new rules will result in an immediate cessation of benefits for many children currently enrolled in the program and will create additional bureaucratic requirements on the already financially strained Connecticut Department of Social Services.

On August 1, the U.S. House of Representatives passed the Children's Health and Medicare Protection (CHAMP) Act by a vote of 225 to 204. Larson and Courtney voted in favor of this legislation which would reauthorize and fund the SCHIP program at \$50 billion.

Larson stated: **"House passage of the CHAMP Act earlier this month brought hope to nearly 50,000 uninsured children in Connecticut. However, with the stroke of a pen, the President wants to completely undo the work of Congress and deny states like Connecticut the ability to provide assistance to more children in need. Under the President's plan, many lower-income children would be forced to receive care in emergency rooms, like the one here at CCMC, instead of a more appropriate setting, like**

a doctor's office.

Courtney stated: **"With this middle of the night policy change, President Bush has undermined Connecticut's efforts to expand and improve health coverage for children. Connecticut could face potential losses in federal funding that could result in children being thrown off HUSKY, rather than adding more children in need. I strongly oppose this policy change and support a remedy through the passage of the CHAMP Act."**

"All of Connecticut's children should have the health care they need to grow and learn. At CCMC, 45% of our patients rely on HUSKY. Without HUSKY B, many of these children would have been uninsured and limited in their access to health care services," said Martin J. Gavin, President and CEO at CCMC.

The thresholds for determining eligibility for SCHIP are based upon the federal poverty level, but states have the authority to reasonably increase those levels to cover more children and families in high cost areas. Connecticut's HUSKY B program allows those families with up to 300 percent family income above the poverty level to enroll. The President's plan will only allow states to cover families above 250 percent of the federal poverty level if participation levels are over 95%. Currently, no states have reached that participation level. Additionally, states that wish to cover families above 250 percent of the federal poverty level would be required to establish a one-year minimum waiting period of being uninsured before those families would be eligible for SCHIP programs. States like Connecticut would then be forced to drop coverage for these lower-income families.

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